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THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1. Statement of Problem

The major task of this thesis shall be to issue an ordered and reasoned statement of the Christian Conception of God. It is written with the firm belief and conviction that the religion of Jesus Christ is the solution of all our problems, and that all the research, all the new light of today yields that as its verdict. To reach that assurance for ourselves, however, requires a careful study and interpretation of the Christian Conception of God and the Incarnation in the light of modern knowledge.

The religion of Jesus Christ was never more compelling in its interest than to-day. This is true partly because so much of what hitherto has gone under its name has been called in question. But also, and perhaps more, because the need of it has never been more felt. All over the civilized world, the sense is growing that all other solutions to our problems are inadequate; they fail to meet man's central want. The world becomes rich; but millionairism fails to satisfy even the millionaires. Our machinery is wonderful, but it does not manufacture happiness. The electric torch of science casts no light on the final mysteries of Life.

We are beginning to realize personality as the soul of things, as the one reason for things. Religion has reached us through the great personalities. Christianity is a religion of personalities; and it holds its place as having in its Founder the deepest rooted

of all the souls we know; the one whose character, teachings, and works reach farthest and highest, "our divinest symbol" as Carlyle has it, the incarnation of all that is to us dearest and holiest.

The following discussion deals, as will be seen with varied aspects of the central theme. It is an endeavour to answer some of the questions which the mind of to-day is putting to religion. It is suggestive rather than exhaustive. It will serve, at least, it is hoped to indicate the road along which religious thought is travelling, and to offer glimpses of the goal toward which it moves.

2. Chief Source of Our Knowledge

It is necessary first to grasp the thought of God that is given in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. He it is who gives us the true point of view and the true knowledge. We must endeavour to become acquainted with God in the manner that He commends to us, and to partake of the rewards of such acquaintance. The Christian conception holds that God is such a Being as Jesus shows Him to be, so that one who knows Him thus will never need to make essential revolution in his thought of Him. In his own soul and in all his revealing Jesus had to do with the real God, the God who exists, the same for ever, and in such a God it is for ever safe to believe. The fact that we obtain knowledge about Him from other sources besides Jesus makes no difficulty for the Christian faith. There are great fields of fact into which his revelation did not enter, and in which new light is sure to arise as our knowledge grows, extending and

enriching our idea of Him whom we adore. But the Christian conception affirms unwaveringly that the view of God which Jesus gives is for ever true, an unalterable verity, changing for us only by being better known. As it is apprehended more worthily, it will open into fresh glory, but the new glory will be the old glory better understood. With such a conception set before us, it must be our first work to make the central substance of it our own. The revelation of God that has been made in Jesus Christ is the heart of the Christian conception of God, in this age as in every other.

Here we have to do with the words of Jesus and the events of his career, which we must interpret with the best wisdom that we can command. But his contribution to the conception is not all contained in his written words, or in the records of his life, for in their experience he imparted to living men a living gift that transfigured all their dealings with God. All this we must understand through historical imagination entering into the life of vanished days, and above all by the discernment of the spiritual eye, the sympathetic perception of the Christian soul. Christian conceptions must be formed from ancient materials by gathering those elements that are spiritually characteristic of Jesus Christ, and building them into a structure that corresponds to their nature. These alone may enter. If anywhere in our biblical material or elsewhere we find a thought that does not agree with the spirit of the testimony of Jesus, it can contribute nothing to our construction of the Christian conceptions. But that rich total of spiritual truth which does accord

with him is ours to use.

3. Definition of Problem

By the Christian conception of God is meant, in the present discussion, the conception of God which Christian faith and thought propose for the present time, in view of the Bible, and of the history, and of all sound knowledge and experience, interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ the Revealer. It is the conception concerning which we can say, at the point at which we now stand, that it is true if Jesus Christ does reveal God truly. It is the view of God for which we may fairly claim that Christianity stands responsible, in the presence of such life and knowledge as surrounds us now. This discussion is designed to present if possible the conception that is grounded in the Christian revelation, developed in history, and now restated once more in the presence of modern knowledge.

CHAPTER II

JESUS REVEALS CHARACTER AND PURPOSE OF GOD

1. Christocentric Theology

Liberal Christians have affirmed their faith in religious certainty on the strength of two basic claims; namely, that Jesus revealed God's purpose for the world--a morally perfect humanity in accord with God's own character. The outlook of liberal Christianity, embracing both its theology and its ethical program, centers in its certainty concerning these two doctrines which form its sources.

But current inquiries are raising the question: Can the character of God be ascertained merely by learning the character of Jesus? --which is the theological way of saying: Can the character of cosmic reality be deciphered in terms of personality? Certain modern writers are replying to this challenge with a single, characteristic assertion: "Jesus is the highest we know, therefore we must interpret God in terms of Christ." The following are typical expressions of this apologetic:

"Our faith in the Christian God rests ultimately upon the appeal which Christ makes to that which is highest in us, together with the conviction that it is rational to interpret the universe by the highest we know."¹

"I think of God as Christlike-----How can I prove this? I

1. Brown, W. A., Christian Theology in Outline. p. 137

can't prove it. I arrive at the thought of a Christlike God by putting the best possible construction on the universe....I mean by putting the best construction on the universe, the belief that right and truth and beauty are the very stuff of which the universe consists, and that those are expressions of a Christlike God. Whatever in the universe makes against such belief I put to one side as something not yet understood."¹

"The typical Christian Liberal....makes his discovery of God in Christ more a matter of spiritual insight than of systematized formula. Many of us have found at least a temporary refuge in this attitude. The deepest question which man's mind asks and man's life at its very center depends upon--What is the truth about God?--has been answered for us in Christ. He is the best we know and we will not interpret God in terms less than that."²

These are religious utterances, rather than philosophical or scientific statements. They mean to express the writers' confidence that the universe is being sustained and controlled by Someone who is morally as good and trustworthy as Jesus. They are the religious outreach of the human to assure himself that he has a place in the cosmos, and that the universe is friendly toward man. And furthermore, that Jesus communicated with and represented a Personality in the universe whom he called Father.

1. McConnell, F. J., The Eternal Spirit, in My Idea of God by J. F. Newton. pp. 258ff.

2. Fosdick, H. E., Modern Use of the Bible. pp. 187-188.

2. Objections to a Christocentric Theology

The most obvious objection to such a Christocentric theology would, in the minds of many people, be the objection to a personal God. The personalist does not use this term in the common significance of the man on the street. He, the personalist, has defined personality as fundamentally consisting of self-consciousness and self-direction. It is true that we cannot without difficulty think of personality as existent apart from a material body, but neither can we think of the mystery of the radio without imagining material particles shooting through space, nor of light save as a vibration of a material ether. These concepts probably have no existence in fact. So even in human personality we cannot place the "self" anywhere. We are conscious of it in distinction from the body through which it acts on the spatial and temporal order. It is a center of self-direction and self-consciousness. We cannot locate it. When we affirm personality of God we do not mean the pictured patriarch of the Dore Bible Gallery but of a power, self-conscious, intelligent, and self-directing upon which all the forces of nature momentarily depend, acting through these forces in an intelligent way. This supreme intelligence upholds and maintains the whole order of relations, not having once created the world but momentarily creating it. Since this source and ground of all things is both purposive and intelligent, what the normal intelligence of man perceives is true.

The most serious objection to this view of God will arise from

two contradictory sources; from the immanentists on the one hand and from the transcendentalists on the other.

If we ask, is God then immanent in this world?--the personalist would answer "yes." Immediately the question of relations arises. Are we then parts of God and is he to be charged with all the meanness, wickedness, and suffering of the world? This is a bitter problem, on which the transcendentalists seem to score. On the other hand if God is absolutely transcendent the transcendentalists cannot show how his existence is of any moment to any of us, since none of us could ever know him, or experience his world. In fact He could not partake of this world even to the extent of creating it. The two terms immanence and transcendence have usually been held as contradictory and would so be admitted by the personalist with this important distinction--paradoxical as it may seem immanence and transcendence come together in what Bergson calls a privileged situation. Immanence and transcendence are both present and present only in personality. This is to an extent true of even the human person--he is in time, subject to time, and yet he would know nothing of time did he not transcend it. His consciousness of time is built on a past moment that no longer exists except for experience, and he looks forward, relating the existing moment to a future one which does not yet exist.

Consequently in thinking of immanence we can think of God as expressing himself through the order of relations in space and time without thinking of matter as a kind of body which is himself. A

living God must be both immanent and transcendent in order to ground or create an order of change and therefore must in this sense be personal.¹

Our ideas of God grow out of our sense of need. We find ourselves baffled and constrained on every side. A strict limit is set to our achievement. We wish and will with all the strength of our lives for good to come in the life of society, for right choices on the part of our fellow men. We find ourselves largely powerless and inefficient in bringing the better day. Our best and most sacrificial efforts fall back upon us with a vast sense of futility and of helplessness before the moral problems of the race. If we are to keep working on we can do it only in the consciousness that the concave of our human weakness is complemented by a convex of moral power; one which neither slumbers nor sleeps, which eventually causes even the wrath of the wicked to praise Him. Therefore our God must in the very beginning be possessed of two characteristics: he must be moral and he must be personal. One could as truly say that he is moral only because he is personal. Our question must therefore be whether in the Christian view God is personal?

3. The Necessity of a Personal Conception of God

There lies within the depths of every human personality, like the mark of a family resemblance upon a man's face--only infinitely

1. Adeney, W. F., The Christian Conception of God. pp. 86-120.

more real and significant—the mark of a divine image. To thought this Image may be defined more exactly as "personality." The Image of God does not mean anything less than that God is personality, provided there is an adequate understanding of the concept of personality. Idealism defines personality as the subjective realization of objective spirit—that is, of absolute spirit.

Each personality is constituted by the same spirit, which is, in the last analysis, reason. Each personality is personality as far as it participates in reason. Thus each one knows the other.

Personality has no limitations and, therefore, another personality is no real limit for us because, in the last analysis, we have at our disposal the spirit of reason, as does also the other person.

For Christian thought, personality is the final limit of thinking and the ultimate reality. Only personality can limit us, because the other personality has its own demands and claims, its own law and will, which are in us just so far as we are or become developed personalities. When we come therefore to think of God as an Absolute and Free personality, then our personalities demand that he shall be both immanent and transcendent and there is no incongruity in the possession of both these qualities if he be living and personal.

An impersonal God, a static God, one who cannot meet the crisis of change can never meet our needs. Furthermore to such a God our struggle, our moral victory or defeat, would be utterly meaningless because he would have struck the moral balance long

ago and could have no further interest in results which he had specifically known since the beginning. We must have a living God of continuing responsibility. We think of Him, then, as creative. He not only created the world in the long ago, he just as clearly creates it now as ever. It is not something that, having begun, could run on and on without Him. It is His living masterpiece. His will keeps momentarily valid all that sweep of infinite relationships which we call the cosmos, and of which as yet the children of men have spelled out only a tiny fraction of the alphabet of meaning.

That center of activity which we call an atom is but the forceful manifestation of His purpose. The world itself with all its relations is sustained and upheld by Him. Hence it is literally as well as figuratively true that not a sparrow falls without the Father's notice and that vaster dream of another poet reiterated by the greatest Christian seer of all the ages becomes startlingly true, "In Him we live, and move and have our being," for we are His offspring. This living God who is thus continuously manifesting Himself has seen fit apparently to provide a world of cosmic relations and to divide power over it with at least one type of His creatures. These creatures owe this power to their ability to reflect upon their own mental moods and responses. Their appearance introduces a new element into the situation, because a world that was already pronounced good must now include a voluntary goodness on the part of those creatures who through reflection are

endowed with moral choices. It was a venturesome and a perplexing problem—that of introducing rival powers into His kingdom. Venturesome because the outcome is in doubt through the possible choice of evil by these creatures, perplexing because it brought to the creator new moral responsibility. But it was a distinct advance in creation, because this creation involved character, a world that could be in harmony intellectual and moral with its creator. If we must think of morality and personality in the creator, then a creation lacking in moral elements would have been imperfect.¹

Therefore from this view of human personality and morality we turn to look upon personality in God. Here at once we meet this difference, that in God we do not trace the genesis of personality. Not in relations do we find it originating, or on them depending. We can say that outside of relations man would not have become a person, but we cannot say the same of God. Of God outside of relations we have no knowledge; and certainly what we know of him within relations is not of a kind to make us conjecture that He depends upon them for His personality. But of God within relations we may speak. In his case, as in ours, relations bring to expression those powers of self-consciousness and self-determination which make up personality. The Christian doctrine uses its terms in a sense that accords with our experience and knowledge when it says that God is a personal Being. By this is meant, that God is One who knows Himself, or is conscious of Himself and the significance of His being; that He is One who directs His own action,

1. Clarke, W. N., Christian Doctrine of God. pp. 59ff.

making it expressive of the self of which he is conscious; and that he is related to other being, and other being is related to him. A conscious, intelligent, active, related being--this is the Christian conception of God which attributes to Him personality.

It is quite superfluous to show that the God and Father of Jesus is thus a self-conscious being who directs his own action, that he knows, loves, and acts, that he exercises the powers of a rational mind and does the work of a reasonable will, in relations with other existence. What this modern language expresses is all implied in what Jesus says more simply of God. All Christian thought accepts Him as such a Being, and all Christian life proceeds as if He were such. "Pray to thy Father," said Jesus. The Christian faith is faith of one personal being in another.

4. Difference Between Human and Divine Personality

Thus reaching the idea of personality in God from that of personality in men, we must observe what changes come to the idea in this transference. Of course we must drop all such anthropomorphisms as relate to bodily form and aspect, locality and local environment. No longer do we picture or locate God. If we quote the ancient pictorial language, we understand that it is figurative. What is more important is that we must drop all idea of incompleteness and limitation. We cannot imagine the perfect, but we can to some degree imagine the annihilation of imperfections of which we are aware in ourselves. We have an incomplete self-consciousness,

but in God we think of it as complete, or consciousness of all the self-knowing One contains. We know self-direction, applied to parts of our action, but in God we think of it as unhindered and perfect, governing all that he does. We know relations with other beings, which in our case are partly chosen and partly accepted, whether we will or not, but in God we think of them as appointed by himself, entered and maintained in full independence. In God the elements of personality are carried up to perfection. In tracing the process we have transcended the range of humanity, but not the nature of personality. The God whom we discover is a personal being in the same sense with us, notwithstanding that his personality rises above ours by the height of perfection. Without fear, therefore, the Christian faith holds the doctrine of a personal God as true doctrine, to be better understood, but not superseded, by knowledge yet to come.

This being the case we find ourselves endowed with certain limited powers, with certain limited freedom, and in order to achieve our best and highest self-expression we find thrust upon us the task of cooperating with God in finishing his morally uncompleted world. Now this is a task which forbids the petty. It denies us the right to live like the beasts, to be absorbed solely in food and drink, the pleasures of the eye, the prides and passions of power and lust. Here is a call to all that is divine, and obviously we can accomplish even a slight portion of such a mission as this only by giving ourselves wholly to it. Such a devotion, however great and

entrancing it may appear, calls for toil, for sustained weariness, for sacrifice. Is there any human, any living, example of this, who can set it in unmistakable and concrete terms so that 'he who runs may read.' Is God himself demanding of us a sacrifice for truth which he would not make? If he is, then for us to lay down our lives for it or even to suffer for truth is to be superior to God, and such a God we cannot worship. How then are we to identify goodness with God? The Gospels tell us of a Man who came and who impressed even his enemies with his sinlessness. That is to say, the only faults they could find in Him were the conventional ones, like breaking certain liturgical rules that had been laid down by long custom and which had created an artificial conscience for the men of His time. Certain startled followers managed to tell what they recalled of His words and deeds. Through all these eighteen centuries He has remained in the fierce limelight of criticism and of hostility and yet He has continued to grow in His power on men. One can go to the darkest jungles of Africa and tell the story of this Man's love, and whatever his race or previous condition of ignorance or moral darkness the man who hears it can never be at peace in his heart again until to the conviction, "that is the kind of man I ought to be," he adds the resolve, "that is the kind of man through God I am going to be." When he makes that resolve peace comes into his heart. Where men in considerable groups make it, the face both of nature and of society changes. The self-expressions of men become kindlier and juster, arts and

culture are winged with a new spirit and there develops a new earth. There is about this universal conviction something cosmic. We can explain His curiously universal applicability to all ages and all men only on a double ground. He must first have been intensely human to touch so many human heartstrings. He must have been typically human. He must be what all of us should be at our best. To stop there, however, is to condemn Him with faint praise. More than that, it is embarrassing to us to claim to be co-workers, co-creators with the Eternal. We could scarcely be this unless we were sons of the Divine, partakers in the Divine nature. Where then shall we place this Man? When we read His story we say: yes, God must love like that; when we study His relations with poor men and rich men, with petted men and outcast men, with religious men and with irreligious men, with men who came to swinehusks through riotous living and men who happened on the drier husks of a loveless religion, we say to ourselves, if God himself were here in the flesh he would do something like that. And so Jesus becomes to us not only the picture of what we ought to be, but also the picture of what God is, and because we cannot distinguish between Goodness and Goodness we say of a truth this is the Revealer of God.

5. Conclusions

In the light of foregoing discussion we may safely conclude our major problem by saying that whether the world chooses to accept it or not, the fact remains that the genuinely Christian conception of

God is the Christ conception, not merely Christ's own conception of God, or that which He gives us in His express teaching on the subject, but the conception that we form from our contemplation of Him. If this conception is not accepted, it is none the less the Christian conception.

The Christian Conception of God is a simple one. A babe born of poor parents, born in a stable among cattle because there was no room for them in the village inn---no room for them in the inn---what a master touch! Revealed to shepherds---religious people inattentive, royalty ignorant, or bent on massacre---a faint perception, according to one noble legend, attained in the Far East---where also similar occurrences have been narrated. The child growing into a peasant youth, brought up to a trade; at length a few years of itinerant preaching; flashes of miraculous power and insight; and then a swift end: condemned by religious people; his followers overawed and scattered, himself tried as a blasphemer, flogged, and finally put to death on the Cross of Calvary.

Simplicity most thorough, and most strange! In itself it is not unique; such occurrences seem inevitable to the highest humanity in an unregenerate world; but who, without inspiration, would see in them a revelation of the nature of God? The life of Buddha, the life of Joan of Arc, are not thus regarded. Yet the Christian revelation is clear enough and true enough if our eyes are open, and if we care to read and accept the simple record which, whatever its historical value, is all that has been handed down to us.

The Christian Conception of God certainly has involved, and presumably always will involve, an element of the miraculous—a flooding of human life with influences which lie outside it, a controlling of human destiny by higher and beneficent agencies; by evil agencies too,—for the influences are not all one-sided; but the Christian faith is that the good are the stronger. Experience has shown in many a saint, however tormented by evil, that an appeal to the powers of good can result in ultimate victory. Let us not reject experience for dogmatic assertion and baseless speculation.

Historical records tell us of what has been regarded as a Divine Incarnation. We may consider it freely on historical grounds. We are not debarred from contemplating such a thing by anything that science has to say to the contrary. Science does not speak directly on the subject. If the historical evidence is adequate we may credit it, just as we may credit the hypothesis of survival if the present-day evidence is good. It sounds too simple and popular an explanation; too much like the kind of ideas suited to the unsophisticated man and the infancy of the race. True; but has it not happened often in the history of science that reality has been found simpler than our attempted conception of it? Electricity long ago was often treated as a fluid; and until a short time ago it was customary to jeer at the term mobility being ascribed to electricity. And yet, to-day, because of recent discoveries people no longer question but accept the theory that

electricity has some of the characteristics of a fluid. The earlier guess was not so far wrong after all. Meanwhile we learned to treat it by mathematical devices, and other recondite methods. With great veneration must we speak of the mathematical physicists of the past century. They have been almost superhuman in certain ways, and have attained extraordinary results, but in time the progress of discovery will enable mankind to apprehend all these things more simply. Progress lies in simple investigation as well as in speculation and thought up to the limits of human power; and when things are really understood they are perceived to be fairly simple after all.

So likewise with the conception of God.

No matter how complex and transcendently vast Reality must be the Christian conception of God is humanly simple. It appeals to the man in the street; it appeals to the unlettered and ignorant; it appeals to "babes."

That is the way with the greatest things. The sun is the center of the solar system, a glorious object full of mystery and unknown forces, but the sunshine is a friendly and homely thing, which shines in at a cottage window, touches common objects with radiance, and conduces to comfort--yes, conduces to the comfort of an animal.

The sunshine is not the sun, but it is the human and terrestrial aspect of the sun; it is that which matters in daily life. It is independent of study and discovery; it is given us by direct experience, and for ordinary life it suffices.

Dr. W. F. Adeney writes, "The Christian conception of God is

that idea of His nature and character which we derive from Jesus Christ. Therefore it depends on our valuation of Christ. In this way it becomes to us an idea of Faith. It cannot be evolved by abstract speculation. It is not to be arrived at by a contemplation of the physical universe and an induction of facts of Nature. Whatever we may learn of the Divine by means of ontological or cosmological methods--and some may think much and some little--our peculiarly Christian knowledge of God as our Father, whose highest attribute is perfect love, comes to us from what we see in Christ, and depends for its fulness and its assurance on the extent to which He has won our soul's confidence and captured our heart's devotion.¹

1. Adeney, W. F., The Christian Conception of God. p. 273.

CHAPTER III

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

1. The Idea of God in Modern Life

If we look for the meaning of a personal God in the immediate facts of modern life, it is very easy for us to conclude that the idea of God is even more impotent than the ideal of disarmament. The forces and passions which govern human life to-day seem in large measure to be so petty, so selfish, and so materialistic, that there is almost no way of relating them to God. Where is God in this world of crises and wars, depression and dissipation? The cynic finds plenty to gloat over. Moreover, even in better times than the present, it has always been easy to doubt, and the independent American has always claimed the right to have his own opinions, whether they were well grounded or not. The idea of God, like every idea about the real world beyond our own immediate experience of every day, is capable of being doubted, and you can well trust the human race sooner or later to doubt whatever it can doubt. It is well that this is so, for no belief should be accepted without rigid scrutiny. But it is important to note clearly that the possibility of doubting anything is no disproof of its existence. If it were, nothing whatever would exist, for substantially everything has been doubted. In particular, frankness compels us to acknowledge that it is just as hard for the ordinary person sincerely to believe

the modern theory of physics as to believe in God. How many readers of this paper are able to believe without any serious question that what they are seeing as black marks on white paper actually consists of innumerable, tiny, invisible electrons and protons? The truth of physics carries us so far beyond the evidence of our senses that we are confused and dismayed. Yet we believe that the theories of physics about unseen electrons and also the faith of religion about the unseen God are both true and are capable of revolutionary practical applications.

2. The "Personal" in God

Behind the specific problems of the Christian evidences lies a deeper and more fundamental problem, and the answer to it will determine our whole attitude to religion. It is obviously a difficult problem: We refer to the question whether God is a person. The issue here raised is of paramount importance if religion is to justify itself as a way of life. That God is personal is the working postulate of spiritual religion, the foundation on which the religious temple is built. For the religious relation, as we envisage it, is a relation between persons, between God on the one hand and man on the other. We do not, of course, mean that this holds true at every stage of man's history. The lower nature-religions, for instance, move in the region of a vague spiritism, and their gods are relatively characterless beings. But, except in the case of pantheistic and nihilistic systems, such as Brahmanism

and Buddhism, the growing religious consciousness has more and more clearly defined the religious relation is a personal one, the I of the worshiper and the Thou of the Deity. Prayer and worship, revelation and inspiration, become unintelligible on any other interpretation. If the values which are bound up with these movements of the religious spirit are to be conserved, then the movements in question must refer to and be justified by the reality of a personal God. If we hold that the predicate "personal" when applied to the Deity is only a convenient fiction, or handy symbol to cover human ignorance, the conclusion follows that the main development of the religious consciousness rests on an illusion. And the inference is something radically different from what it has been in the past. The continuity of religious development must be sacrificed.

3. The Conception of An Impersonal Deity

It has been suggested that this is not necessary. Some modern thinkers suppose that personality may be denied to God and yet a kind of continuity in religious evolution be preserved. Religion, they tell us truly enough, has passed through certain stages of growth. At a low level deities are sub-personal; at a higher level they are endowed with personality; but even a religion which conceives its deity as one and personal is not final: it belongs to the stage when the religious mind is still a slave to figurative representations and is quite uncritical in its use of images. An old habit is hard to discard, and Mr. Bradley has told

us that "we are everywhere dependent on what may be called useful mythology."¹ But these images, though they serve a purpose for a time and have thus a kind of justification, are neither adequate nor really true, and the way of progress lies in gradually setting them aside. One of the images in question is a personal Deity. In future, men of enlightenment will think of God as an impersonal Spirit or an unconscious Mind. So, for example, Von Hartmann has told us.

One might raise the question whether the notion of an impersonal spirit is less difficult and more consistent than that of a personal Deity. Without, however, entering on this matter at present, let us note a current of modern thought, more practical perhaps in its origin but yet tending to the same negative conclusion. The movement in question is critical rather than constructive; its natural issue is agnosticism. Its apostles, following the bent of their fancy have drawn a confused and inconsistent picture of God, and have invested him with the virtues as well as the defects of a human being. Their argument is that we should not pretend to know when we really do not know, and the conclusion is a plea for agnosticism as the only sane philosophy of life. For what applies to God applies to theology in general. "There is," says Leslie Stephen, "no proposition of natural theology the negative of which has not been maintained as vigorously as the positive." This is a train of thought which appeals to many in

1. Essays on Truth and Reality. p. 431.

these days, and even to some who, ostensibly at least, have not broken with the Christian religion. In men and women haunted by these "obstinate questionings," the religious outlook is darkened by growing clouds or becomes dim in a feeble and uncertain twilight. It will not be denied, therefore, that anything that can be urged which makes faith in a Divine Personality easier and more reasonable is a real gain to spiritual religion.

4. Justification of the Personal Conception

At the outset let us bear in mind that nothing will be won by ignoring the difficulties involved or by summarily treating doubt on this subject as a wilful and perverse skepticism. The objectors are often quite honest in the perplexities they feel, and the fair-minded apologist will admit they are not to be disposed of in a high-handed fashion. The argument from authority will not meet their case, and one must try to understand their position. Let it be granted, then, that the use of human analogies in reference to God has obvious limitations and easily leads to contradictions. On the other hand one cannot blink the fact that the idea of an impersonal God or Absolute raises other difficulties of the most serious kind. If the world-ground is impersonal, the emergence of persons within the world-process is a baffling phenomenon for which it is hard to assign a sufficient reason. Moreover, if agnosticism or pantheism is right, the claims of the spiritual values cannot be effectively maintained, and it is not easy to see why they should

ever have come to be made. If the Supreme Good is a human abstraction and not a Personal Spirit, the whole system of religious values is undermined, and the whole structure of human faith must ultimately collapse.

In this situation the religious thinker is called on to justify, if possible, his right to speak of God as a personal Being. He must try to give a reason for his faith, if he can. Before we go farther, then, let us be clear as to what we mean by personality, let us understand just how much we suppose is involved in the idea. The term is sometimes used loosely; it may mean self-consciousness simply, or it may denote something more. Yet a deity who is self-conscious and nothing else—who is simply thought, reflecting on itself—is not all that the Christian means when he says that God is personal. For he implies by the word that God is not only self-conscious but is an ethical Will and exercises a purposive activity. So much at least is involved in the conceptions of divine revelation and divine providence. Now here we have to meet the objection that we are carrying over into the divine or transcendent sphere ideas and activities which have no intelligible meaning save in the mundane sphere. Thinking and willing imply data and limitations, which are present in the case of man but cannot be supposed to exist in the case of God. The objection is definite, and if we are to meet it we must scrutinize the conditions under which human personality develops, that we may decide how far these conditions are essential to any and every form of personality. It may be

possible that the human type of person is not a perfect type nor the only conceivable type.

Beyond dispute personality in man is a development within the wider whole of experience. Animals and infants are centers of experience, but they do not exist for themselves, and we cannot speak of them as persons. They are individuals, however, for they possess an inner life, and as inner unities they are definitely distinguished from what we call things and from other beings of the same class. Individuality is not personality but it is the pre-supposition of personality; it is on a pre-existing individual basis that a personal life develops. Personality is an enlargement of individuality, or, better yet, it is individuality raised to a higher power. The person has a being for himself. He has a definite character and sphere of action, with rights and privileges and corresponding responsibilities, and he distinguishes himself from and relates himself to other persons. In common parlance a personality denotes a man of pronounced character. A personal life is a life realized in a society of persons, and it is through this social reference that the life of the individual man receives a specific personal content. The ethical precept, "Be a person and respect others as persons" recognizes this social implication.

What then appear to be the specific conditions which make the development of a finite personal existence possible? From what has been said we may conclude that a twofold dependence is involved. (a) There is first the contrast to an external world

of facts or objects which are recognized to be other than the self. Persons stand over against things. It is the task of the psychologist to trace the steps of this process of differentiation by which the self comes to oppose itself to the not-self. Obviously one of the first stages is the distinction of the body from its environment, the perception that it belongs to the active individual in a way that other objects do not. A further stage is the recognition of the self as an inner center of ideation and desire; and finally we rise to the thought of a pure ego or self which sustains and unifies all its activities. As James Ward puts it: "We begin with self simply as an object perceived or imagined, and end with the concept of that object as subject of myself."¹ It is clear, then, that the development of this duality of subject and object is not accomplished by us apart from the contrast of the non-ego, and it is through this contrast that we eventually reach the conception of the self as an inner center which is distinguished from the content of its experience. Were there no distinction in reality the emergence of the distinction in idea would lack a reason. It is by marking off a region of the experienced world as belonging to the not-self that we define the sphere of the self. (b) In a somewhat similar way the self comes to recognize itself as personal in connection with and in contrast to a society of other persons. If we interpret others through ourselves, the knowledge of others also reacts on our self-knowledge. Broadly speaking, we may say that personal and social development advance together, and, apart

1. Psychological Principles. p. 363.

from intersubjective intercourse taking form in language, the individual would never advance to a generalized conception of himself at all. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." It is especially through the relations, positive and negative, to other persons in a social system that the concept of personality as an ethical unity implying rights and obligations is developed. The character and content which are involved in the notion of a person could never be evolved by the self in isolation; its intrinsic resources do not suffice for that.

So far, at least, one would expect general agreement about the interpretation of the facts; the next step, however, raises a question of critical importance. The ego, we admit, comes to a developed knowledge of itself through its relations; but does this mean that the self is a pure abstraction apart from these relations? Some contend that it is so; the relation to the non-ego, they argue, is essential, and apart from it a self becomes a mere fiction. The not-self and the self are as inseparable as, say, the outside of a thing and the inside. And they conclude that the Absolute or God, as the all-embracing Whole, transcends the contrast of ego and non-ego, and therefore cannot be self-conscious and personal. Personality, it is said, is the specific subsistence-form of the finite spirit, and has no application to God who is infinite and absolute. The premises of the argument, nevertheless, may be called in question. For, if there were not an original feeling or experience of self, the process by which the ego defines itself is

made possible by the contrast with the non-ego; but the conceptual process only comes into operation because there is a primary and original feeling or experience of self which is the condition of the process.

The mark of perfection in personality is internal consistency and completeness: the perfect self fully penetrates, organizes and owns its content. Dr. W. N. Clarke defines a perfect person or self as "the being in whom these essential powers which constitute personality(intelligence, affection, and will) exist in perfect quality and degree and are perfectly bound together and welded in use in the unity of self-directing consciousness." Such a conception is not impossible, and such a conception approaches the idea of a personal God. It is poor and barren compared with what God must be, but it does not limit God. The finite self never achieves this conception. It depends for its internal development on stimuli coming from without, stimuli which it often can neither avoid nor control. It is constantly hampered and thwarted by an external environment which it masters incompletely and can but partially transform into a means for its own ends. The body is an imperfect instrument of the soul, and serves only as the basis of an intermittent self-consciousness. It seems to be a condition of our conscious life that there should be regular lapses into the region of the unconscious or the subconscious. Again, man conserves his mental resources for present use by dropping out of memory much that he once knew; in the history of a personal life multitudes of

experiences are thus forgotten, and the self, even when it remembers earlier phases of its experience, may lose the power to enter into and sympathize with them. This lack of inner completeness and consistency appears especially in the moral sphere where a struggle goes on between a higher and a lower self, or, in Pauline phrase, between the spiritual and natural man. This conflict is never crowned by the full and final victory which is presupposed by a perfect ethical self-determination. Hence under mundane conditions the human self never attains to inner harmony, and never perfectly unifies the content of its experience; personality remains an ideal only partially realized. This is what we should expect when we remember that the finite self does not contain within itself the conditions of its own existence. For this reason we cannot suppose that personality in man is more than an imperfect analogy or defective copy of personality in God. The limitations to which we are subject cannot have a counterpart in the Divine Nature, and this is the reason why some prefer to speak of God as supra-personal. There need be no objection to the word, as long as the elements of ethical and spiritual value connoted by personality are conserved in the conception of the Deity.

5. The Personal Conception As Applied to God

The crucial question is: With what modifications can we take the category of personality known in our experience and apply it to God? The theistic conception is that of a Being who is Ground

of all that exists, but is only limited in so far as he limits himself. God, therefore, cannot be confronted, as man is, with an independent not-self which is the condition of the development of his self-consciousness. But is self-consciousness conceivable on these terms? Here let us bear in mind that even in man an original self-experience was the presupposition of the evolution of self-consciousness. And though the process of development was mediated by the not-self, yet this dependence constituted a limitation. The more a man is conditioned by external facts and impressions, the weaker is his personality. The growth of personality in man takes the form of a development toward internal completeness, unity, and self-determination. The ideal that man strives after, then, in the temporal process of experience must be an eternally complete reality in God. A difficulty would no doubt still remain if we suppose that God is a pure unity from which every element of difference and change is excluded. But this is not a possible conception. The difference involved in self-consciousness falls within the divine nature; it is given in the distinction between the divine self and its changing states. The contrast between the divine and the human ego would lie in the fact that the divine consciousness is continuous and complete in itself, while that of man is broken and dependent on conditions outside itself. The divine self-consciousness would be a perfect self-consciousness, since it is entirely self-contained and self-conditioned, and perfectly unifies its own experience. For the element of dependence on what lies beyond the

self, present in the case of man, falls away in the case of God.

Yet there is more in personality than pure self-consciousness. As we saw in the instance of man, it was the practical relations of social life, the interaction of wills in a social system, which developed and gave content to the idea of a person. The concrete conception of personality implies action; and when we think of God as personal we think of him as an active and ethical Will who is ground of both the world of existences and the realm of values. The static idea of God, the idea of a Being resting in the eternal contemplation of himself, is more in harmony with deism than with a genuine theism. To the theist God is essentially active and creative, the living and ever-present Ground of the universe which he sustains. We entangle ourselves in intolerable contradictions if we suppose that God rested in the contemplation of himself for an indefinite time, and then, suddenly quickened to activity, brought the world and finite spirits into being by an arbitrary act of will. It is impossible to conceive an explanation of this abrupt outbreak of creative activity at a particular point in time; for, if the creation of the world meant the realization of a good, then we must suppose that prior to the creative act God was content with a defect of good. The difficulty here is partly due to the fact that we imagine our concept of time, gradually elaborated on the basis of mundane experience, existed prior to the experience out of which it was developed. Augustine, following Plato, sought to obviate this perplexity by saying that

God brought time into being along with the world. The truth seems to be that we cannot fit the divine creative activity into our time-scheme at all; the more adequate idea is to think of God as the eternally creative Ground of the world and finite spirits. In other words, we must abandon the static conception of God and hold that it belongs to his character to be self-revealing, to actualize his Will in a world of interacting things and persons. In the Christian doctrine of the Logos, and in the recurring thought of Scripture that God is love, there is the suggestion that self-communication is a need of the divine nature. The spiritual and ethical idea of God is not that of a Being who is self-centered but who is self-manifesting. In the case of man ethical personality was developed in relation to a society of persons; the individual personality is enlarged and enriched by the social relations into which it enters. And there is something in the human analogy which is helpful to us here. God as an ethical and spiritual person is manifested in the world of spirits that he sustains and redeems. Apart from this expression of himself in the world of souls that he disciplines and inspires the Divine Personality would lack fulness of meaning and content.

The line of thought that I have been trying to suggest receives support, I venture to believe, from Christian experience. The conception of the personal God in which the Christian rests and finds satisfaction is that of the God who reveals himself in and to man, whose goodness and love are reflected in the face of

Jesus Christ. To justify as far as possible on general grounds the conception of personality as applied to God demands, as we have seen, metaphysical thinking; on the other hand we must admit that Divine Personality can only receive its full ethical meaning and content when brought into living relation with the revelation in Christ. But this supreme revelation has its presupposition in that wider activity of God in virtue of which he sustains all souls and works in and through them.

The view here outlined has to be carefully distinguished from the speculative idealism which merges all spirits in the Absolute Spirit and treats them as phases or moments of its life. On this theory finite minds are differentiated from God and one another by standing in organic relation to material bodies; but their being for self is only apparent, and in the end they all fall within the Absolute Mind. In other words religious communion between the human and the Divine Spirit is construed as a process of identification. Though the language of some mystics gives countenance to this idea, it does not truly express the normal religious consciousness, which involves a real element of difference as well as a relation of dependence. The view here suggested is definitely distinguished from this theory by the acceptance of the conception of God as the Creative Will who gives reality to a dependent world and a kingdom of finite spirits. I am far from supposing that the idea of creation raises no difficulties, as a matter of fact we can only think of it through imperfect analogies, but the point

is whether any other idea does not raise still greater difficulties. It has been justly said that if, in trying to apprehend the relation of God to the world, "the idea of creation will carry us farther, and if nothing else will, then the idea is rationally justified though it be not empirically verified."¹

In harmony with this, the divine immanence must always be taken in connection with the divine transcendence. The so-called indwelling of God in man's spiritual experience cannot mean that that experience is simply God's experience; it does mean that there is an activity of the Divine Spirit making itself felt in quickening and inspiring human spirits. The religious man does not seek to become God; he aspires to a concord of life and will with God.

The personality of God as an ethical Spirit is expressed through his manifold dealings with the great company of souls who owe their being and life to him. And man's response to God is seen in his age-long endeavor to transcend his narrow individual existence and gain a full spiritual and personal life. It is the great Godward movement of souls. The direction of the movement is best defined through the historic revelation in which God's personal character is expressed, for if man seeks God if haply he may find him, God in turn seeks man. It is through the increasing spiritual apprehension of the seeking and saving God revealed in the society of redeemed and upward-striving souls, that man advances to the fruition of his personal life. Apart from God, the perfect Personality, our broken and fragmentary personalities cannot reach

1. Ward, Realm of Ends. p. 246.

completeness and fulfillment.

Thus far we have been examining the state of personalism or personality from the point of view of people who have had some training in philosophy. I believe we can very safely conclude our discussion so far, by saying that the outlook for belief in a personal God in the intellectual world is by no means hopeless. But it is one thing to have a sound intellectual basis for faith in God; it is quite another to have that belief function in life. So let us next discuss our problem, briefly, from the practical point of view.

Before we can make any progress in a discussion from the practical point of view it is very important to get a clear understanding of what a personal God means in terms of the actual experiences of to-day.

"To call God personal is to hold that the functions of conscious personality are present in him to the highest possible degree. Those functions are feeling, thought and will. If we approach God through feeling, he is our comfort. If we approach him through thought, he implies a criticism of our entire civilization. If we approach him through will he is the principle of Cosmic progress."¹

Brightman points out that if we approach God through feeling he becomes our comfort. It seems, however, that a very definite emphasis must be made of the sadly neglected fact that we can

1. Brightman, Is God a Person. p. 55.

experience His comfort only when we long to become like Him, not when we demand that He shall be like us. Furthermore we can find spiritual comfort for our life of feeling only when we believe in God sincerely with our intellect. I do not mean to overemphasize the intellectual side of life, but I do mean that every believer must be intellectually honest.

If we think of God from the point of view of rational ideals, we have an idea of the utmost importance for life. For we may be in great doubt about what the will of God is, but we may be very sure what it is not. It is not self-contradiction, jealousy, mutual destruction, and injustice, such as we find in the daily affairs of life. At this point we have to face one of the most difficult practical questions about the belief in a personal God. If it be said we approach God through thought, He implies a criticism of our entire civilization, how is it then that this divine judgment has had so little effect on believers in God? There are two very obvious answers that suggest themselves. The first is that men do not believe in God firmly enough to be willing to make the personal and social sacrifices that would be necessitated by any attempt to act as a good personal God would desire that men should act. The second reason is somewhat different. It is that we have accustomed ourselves to using God for our ends, instead of seeking to use ourselves for His ends. If humanity would only attempt to discover what the will of a supremely good person would

be, the very act of attempting could not help but act as a transforming social power; and the believer in a personal God would have faith that God himself would respond to this attempt.

We have thought of the feeling God as comfort and of the thinking God as critic; now let us consider the willing God as a source of progress. A personal God does not merely give us sympathy and solace, or merely condemn us for our sins. His whole being is a movement, a creative and a purposive activity, which is an expression of will. Belief in a personal God is not, as some strangely take it to be, a belief in stagnancy and unchangeability. To be a person is to act; and to be a Supreme Person is to act eternally and creatively towards the highest possible ends. The faith in a personal God begets a faith in eternal progress towards an inexhaustible goal.

6. Truth, Goodness, and Love Imply Personality

There are some thinkers who would speak of God as the Spirit of truth, goodness, love, and yet would refuse to call Him personal. But is not this an attempt at making an imaginary distinction? Can we conceive spirit otherwise than as subject, as the unity and the identity of the self? If God be truth, He thinks; goodness, He wills; love, He feels. Can thought, volition, emotion, or affection be detached from a subject? They have meaning only within self-consciousness. The characteristics of human consciousness--unity and identity--must be assigned to the divine self-consciousness.

Above all local and temporal conditions God is eternally and infinitely one and the same; in Him is no division and no change. There is oneness and sameness amid the fulness and wholeness of His life. And that life can be most adequately described in those ideals which give to the life of man its loftiest meaning and its greatest worth, the truth of the mind, the goodness of the will, the love of the heart. We may then truly and fitly speak of God as personal.

7. Personal Union of God and Man in Christ

May not this conception of personality as common to God and man help us to conceive the union of God and man in Christ? The difficulty of the traditional Christology is that it places side by side in the person of Christ the human and the divine nature, and the duality of nature is never merged in the unity of the person. Generally the integrity of the humanity has been sacrificed to the completeness of the divinity. An impersonal humanity is assumed by the personal Logos, or Word of God. Sometimes Jesus acts as man, and sometimes as God. Or His humanity is ignorant of what to His divinity is intelligible. When we apply this Christology to the Gospels, we do not know whether Jesus is speaking with the authority of God or the limitation of man. While in former times the manhood was as a rule allowed to fall into the background, and the Godhead came always to the front, at present the tendency is so to assert the humanity as to obscure the divinity.

We need a restatement of Christology which will not start with abstract definitions of the divine and human natures, and then attempt by many ingenious expedients to reconcile the contradictory attributes; but will begin with the historical reality, the self-consciousness of Jesus, and from the data thus afforded will draw its conclusions regarding the kind and the degree of union between the divine and the human in His person. In this modern Christology the conception of personality must take a very prominent place. If God and man are both personal, there is in the nature of each the bond of union. Neither God nor man needs essential change to become one. If, still more, human personality is in the course of development in order to realize progressively the ideal which is eternal reality in God, then human personality is not mutilated but completed by participation in the life of God and divine personality does not assume a mode of existence alien to its own in sharing the life of man.

Infinitude and absoluteness are the characteristics of the mode of personality in God. In Him personality is self-existent, self-determined, and self-limited. It is evident that neither infinitude nor absoluteness can be characteristic of the mode of personality in man. Jesus always confessed His dependence on His Father; the terms Father and Son would have no meaning at all, if dependence had not marked the life of Jesus. In relation to the world, the divine personality is omnipresent, omniscient, and

omnipotent; the mind and the will of God are expressed and exercised in the Universe, but not limited, by its finite, relative conditions. There is no space-distribution and no time-succession in God, as in the world; and therefore the immanence of the divine intelligence and the divine energy is not conditioned as the Universe is; but God in His perfection always is, knows, and works in every span of space and every moment of time. Man is in being, knowing, and doing conditioned and limited by time and space. Not only is the totality of his knowledge and power limited, but he never possesses his mind and strength fully. His whole personality cannot be concentrated in any one moment of experience or activity. We do not in the Gospels find any claim made by Jesus to these divine attributes of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. In the days of His flesh He was localised in body; He confessed limitations of knowledge and sought information from others; His miraculous power was dependent on prayer to God, and hindered by unbelief in man. If we duly consider, we shall recognise even that His moral development through temptation and trial would have been impossible without such limitations and conditions, that His filial relation to God could be real only as God taught Him what He knew, gave Him His works to do, imparted His fulness of life to Him. Not only in order to be manifest as human personality, but even to show divine personality in filial relation, these attributes are manifested in the Incarnation.

But if God is essentially perfect personality, truth, goodness, love, and if the ideal was reality in Christ, while it is only very partially realised in other men, may we not affirm that, without possessing or exercising these attributes of the divine mode of personality, He nevertheless shared what is essentially the life of God? It is as knowing, trusting, loving, and serving God as Father that Jesus claims to be Son. It is to a false metaphysics that we owe the assumption that ethical sonship, sonship revealed and realised in the entire personal development, is something else and less than an ontological sonship might be. If spirit be the ultimate reality, then there can be nothing more real than the sonship of Jesus as expressed in His self-consciousness. It is with God as Father that is, with wisdom, goodness, and love perfect and communicative that Jesus knew Himself to be one in His thoughts, feelings, aims, deeds; and it is vain to conceive a unity with God more real than this. In this personal union of God and man there is essential union.

The human personal development in Jesus was not arrested, or diverted, or mutilated by this union with God; but its possibility was realized, and its promise was fulfilled. Jesus was perfect man in being Son of God; for it was no alien relationship He assumed, but it was mankind's destination to God He accomplished. His mind was no less human in its operations because it was the channel of divine truth; His will was not less man's free will

because it was exercised in doing the righteousness of God; His heart was not less what man's may be, because it received and diffused God's fatherly love. Receptivity for God is not a contradiction but a completion of human personality; for man, as an isolated, independent individual, cannot realise the ideal which is God. God has not so made man that He Himself should be external to man. The individuality of man as creature does not, and cannot, mean absolute exclusion of the Creator. It is in fellowship with God, then, that man is to show the likeness of God. Jesus, in becoming more and more the Son of God, became not less but more perfectly man. As His receptivity for the divine communication was truly human, it was a developing one. The Incarnation was, as Dörner has insisted, progressive; the union of man and God in Christ was conditioned by the laws and the stages of human development. The child Jesus did not know the divine wisdom or exercise the divine power given to Him beyond the measure of His childhood. As the possibility of the human personality was realized, so the closeness, the compass, and the content of its union with divine personality advanced and increased. It is only by such a conception of the Incarnation that we can fully recognize the reality of the humanity of Jesus without obscuring the divinity. Personality as common to God and man; human as completed only in divine personality---these must be fundamental principles of our Christology.

Not only in Christ is human personality completed, but in

Him men are called to become sons of God. What distinguishes Him from all His brethren is that it is through faith in His grace that this union of man with God is mediated. His receptivity is fully developed, the divine communication of life is fully made; in Him it hath pleased God that the fulness of the Godhead should dwell bodily (that is, under the conditions of incarnation), and we may now receive of that fulness. It is in fellowship with the living Christ that human personality attains its completion; the life in the Spirit is a new creation in comparison with the creation subject to the bondage of corruption, but it is also the full consummation of human destiny. The ideal becomes progressively realized in man through the Spirit of God, and thus human personality becomes more and more fully an image of divine personality.

CHAPTER IV

PERSONALITY AND THE INCARNATION

1. Incarnation the Foundation of Christian Faith

The incarnation of God in Christ Jesus is the most stupendous declaration of the Bible. The doctrine of the Incarnation is the foundation of the Christian faith. As the centre and heart of it stands the amazing truth that God has appeared on earth in a human life, looking at us through a man's eyes, laying a brother's hand upon us. The whole gospel rests on this central verity.

Let us take as our starting-point the Johannine declaration that Christ is the Logos, or World-Principle, through whom and in whom all things have their being. The Logos of John's Gospel is a Personal Divinity and not the impersonal world-principle of the Stoics. This Personal Divinity is the Logos made manifest in a human life and fully revealed in a Person, Jesus Christ. If the Logos is fully revealed in a Person, He cannot be merely an impersonal World-Principle indwelling in the physical world as the source or motive of its active life; as is the Logos of the Stoics or the World-Principle of many modern philosophers. Then again, since Christ is the World-Principle, His life must be regarded "as something more than an isolated event in past history." He must explain all life, or rather the Divine purpose running through the world's life, and moreover His Personality must somehow

reveal the essential nature of all mankind. In other words, He must be at the same time the revelation of the Divine Will which creates and governs our life, and the revelation of the purpose which animates cosmic life.

2. The Cosmos and the Dominating Principle

The universe, if it be truly a cosmos, is the expression of and is dominated by some one principle. There is a law of its being, and that law is in eternal control. In that law is given the real meaning of existence. A cosmos controlled by a Personal Being seems to us richer, more full of meaning, than a cosmos controlled by an impersonal principle. We may be able to go a stage beyond this, and say that it is easier, on the former hypothesis, to understand how there is a cosmos, than if we substitute some other hypothesis. But we cannot be dogmatic in our assertion that if there is a cosmos at all, it must be the expression of that one principle to which we hold.

There are three possibilities. First, the universe may be a cosmos, because controlled at every turn by the working of physical law. In this case, there never has been and never will be anything except physical law. Doubtless, the word "law" should be used at this point with care, for the law is a mere abstraction arrived at through processes of research, comparison and co-ordination. Yet the word is not to be repudiated, since it testifies to the supposed

fact that everything which happens or can happen is the result of the status and changes of physical phenomena, which are the only real things. One of these results is human thinking. But it is obvious that thought itself can be, on this hypothesis, in no sense an originating or controlling principle, and that there is no advance from physics to metaphysics. There remains the interesting question, What is the nature of the ultimate physical constituent? This is just the question which the most primitive Greek thinkers set themselves to answer.

Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes were not metaphysicians; even Heracleitus, despite the fact that he was the first to introduce the idea of the Logos, was really a cosmologist, as were the Stoics who, centuries later, worked his conceptions into a comprehensive system. The really distinctive character of that point of view which finds physical law everywhere, and no other principle in control at any point is that the other three questions, "What is it?" "Who made it?" "What is it for?" which Dr. Henry Jackson has put alongside of the question, "What is it made of?" lose practically all their meaning. Reality becomes the knowledge of phenomena, and to lose grip of phenomena is to plunge into nothingness. There may certainly be plenty of interest and excitement in the attempt to penetrate ever more deeply into the heart of phenomena, to recede from the variety of the world of sense to the simplicity of the underlying, basal matter, and then

again to pass outwards on the road from simplicity to multiplicity the usual result of such action, however, is the loss of all mystical and moral values which suggest a cosmos finally controlled by something other than physical law. Of course the materialist may possess and practise a lofty morality, and presumably he can, if he wishes, develop a type of mysticism which might, for instance, concentrate on the thought of the reabsorption of the individual into the world stream. But the moral and the mystical are in his theory the products of the physical, and merely witness to certain physical arrangements. There is no real contrast between mystical and moral on the one hand and physical on the other, but only between one physical combination and its by-products as compared with another and its by-products. And the problem of existence itself, the fact that as Parmenides put it, "Whatever is, is" remains unsolved. But the materialist might answer that, on any hypothesis, here is an insoluble antinomy, while all he is concerned to maintain is that there is nothing to show that matter does not extend by infinite regress into the past.

Secondly, the controlling principle which is the secret of the cosmos may be found elsewhere than in physical phenomena and in those laws which a study of such phenomena reveals. It may be held that physical phenomena have, by themselves, no power whatever of constituting and maintaining a cosmos. This was the opinion of Anaxagoras, who rejected the explanations, which were for him no

explanations, of the Ionian thinkers, and introduced another principle. He put the matter very succinctly and clearly thus: "All things were first of all together"--that is, they existed as a chaotic, indiscriminate mass; "then came Mind and distributed and ordered all things." The secret of the cosmos is, according to the implications of this statement, to be looked for along metaphysical, not physical, lines, though Anaxagoras himself had not risen to the idea of mind as immaterial; for him it was the subtlest form of matter. Yet his words make the passage easy to the great idealistic contention according to which control passes to mind, thought, idea. Reality, true being, does not appertain to phenomena, to the things of sense. It is not, of course, the case, that the great idealists have presented a common doctrine; their interpretations and conclusions have differed widely at important points, but their differences have been compatible with a common attitude towards existence.

There is a third possibility. It is not radically different in type from the second in the way that the second is from the first. Indeed, it is absolutely harmonious with one form of the second. Nevertheless, it goes beyond anything to which the second is necessarily committed. For this third possibility involves the assertion that mind, the controlling principle, is to be interpreted personally. Not only the category of mind and thought, but the category of self-conscious mind, personal thinker, becomes

supreme. The idealistic solution may stop short of this. Lotze, indeed, said that only the Absolute was truly personal, but if one takes Plotinus as representing the climax of idealistic thought in ancient times, and Hegel as his modern peer, one could hardly maintain that the notion of personality was one proper to this classical and historic metaphysic. But in this third possible solution personality comes entirely to its own. We live in a cosmos which is the expression of personal thought, will and love. It cannot be said that this is specifically the religious solution, since history shows that the great religions of the world are not at one in this matter, but the division made by the introduction of the notion of personality is so wide and deep that the acceptance or rejection of it means much more than a disagreement within a more fundamental unity.

The cosmos no longer is the same; and the thought of purpose, which is not present at all when we are shut up to physics, and is by no means easily entertained in connection with a metaphysic which regards personality as merely a transient appearance, at once comes into the foreground. And that means, among other things, a new relationship between man--in his life of thought, feeling, and action--and the world-order. If that order proceeds from personality, if its existence witnesses to the operations of personal purpose, if (and given the idea of personal purpose, this is a perfectly reasonable assumption) the world-order moves forward

towards a more perfect reflexion of that principle from which it has sprung, and which works upon it incessantly, then the relationship between man and that order cannot possibly be regarded as a matter of indifference. For personal relationships are of all things the most important. And if man knows himself to be not only part of the cosmos, but related by an interior bond, in virtue of his personality, to the principle controlling all things, then there is a correspondence of unique character and of great possibilities in his essential being.

It is clear that not one of the explanations is free from difficulty. The fundamental difficulty, that of self-existence, confronts all three. It may truly be said that this difficulty reaches its highest point in respect of the first solution, which puts matter in a position of entire supremacy, and that, though the difficulty is unavoidable, any view of the world which raises it in its most acute form starts with a heavy presupposition against it. Yet the other solutions present formidable enough stumbling-blocks. The metaphysical view, when it rests on the thought of the Absolute, and discards the idea of personality in connection therewith, raises the whole question of the positive meaning to be attached to the Absolute. The Absolute is to be thought of as in some sense Spirit; but in what sense? And what is the relation of changing phenomena to the Absolute? Are we to see in them just the self-limitation of the Absolute? Above all, does any valid ground remain for that clear, sharp

discrimination between good and evil, which is so strongly entrenched in experience? The moral difficulty reappears if the third view is embraced. Suppose that the cosmos is the work of mind and will conceived of personally, what sort of personality is revealed through it? If we start from the world as it exists, what conclusion shall we reach? Or if we start from a mind, will, and love, regarded as perfect, how comes it that the reflection in the world is so imperfect? Many will feel that the ascription of personality to the Absolute is a piece of anthropomorphic reasoning, or rather, assumption.

3. Christian Interpretation of the Dominating Principle

Let us consider the actual Christian solution of this problem. But at the outset let us remember one important fact. The Christian solution or answer did not come by the way of formal investigation and conclusion. Christianity has its definitely philosophical side, but Christianity did not arise as an explanation of existence, as a theory of reality, akin to the explanations given in the philosophical schools. For the Christian explanation is a premise rather than a conclusion, something given rather than something discovered. This does not mean that the Christian is not concerned to justify his belief, not that he will not avail himself of arguments used by those who, while they agree with him in thinking of the cosmos as proceeding from a mind, purpose, and

love conceived of personally, yet do not go along with him in those other beliefs which constitute his claim to be a Christian; but his belief is not bound up with these justifications and arguments. For this is just one of those points in which his Hebraic inheritance is most clear. Readers of Dr. Hamilton's important work, The People of God,¹ will remember how sharply he contrasts the Hebrew prophets and the Greek philosophers in respect of their method of arriving at the conviction of the One God. One might almost say that the Hebrew had no precise method. It is true that he appealed constantly to his national history, but there was no exact process of reasoning which, from historical reflection, reached, as an irrefragable result, the belief in One God. The New Testament echoes the Old. Here and there the suggestion of argument appears, as in Paul's speech at Athens (Acts 17:22-31), or in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where the idolater, that is the man who acts upon a false conception of the nature of the ultimate principle behind the cosmos, is reproved for mental blindness and crassness.² The author of the second part of the book of Isaiah,³ had spoken in somewhat similar tones. But the writer to the Hebrews knew that for the Christian view of creation faith was necessary;⁴ that is, there was no possibility of exact logical proof.

But be its methods of approach what they may, and however variously they may be judged, there is no room for reasonable doubt that Christianity is the great buttress and champion of the belief

1. Vol. I, Chap. 1-3.

2. Romans 1:18-25.

3. Isaiah 40,41,44,46.

4. Hebrews 11:3.

that the key to the cosmos is to be found neither in matter as the final reality, gradually developing itself into the most varied forms, nor in an impersonal Absolute, itself apprehended as the only abiding reality amid the myriad changes which pass over those fleeting phenomena which are but the expression of its own self-limitation, but in Personal Mind, Will and Love.¹ Apart from the Christian creed and cultus which, at every turn, point the believer to this fundamental conviction, that belief would have far less chance of holding its own than is in fact the case. There seems to be no good ground for supposing that the theistic explanation of existence would be strengthened, were it detached from those Christian ideas about the nature of God and His self-revelation in Christ, which had, in their origin, nothing to do with philosophy or speculation. Be the cause what it may, the way to the most convinced and glowing faith in God lies through Christ.

It may be worth while at this point to say one word on the objection already alluded--that belief in divine personality is an anthropomorphic assumption--familiar though the reply to this objection will be to readers of Dr. Illingworth's books. Personality represents to us the highest form of existence, unless we start from a radical pessimism which looks on every advance to self-consciousness as something to be deplored. To say that God is personal is to affirm that that stage of conscious existence attained by man persists when we pass, in our thought, from man to

1. Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God*, p. 291.

that ultimate principle of existence which is responsible for man as for all originate things. And if it be said that human personality is an outcome of the evolutionary process, all that for the moment the Christian needs to contend is, not only that human personality was involved, at the outset of the evolutionary process, as a potentiality certain to be actualized, but also that human personality is the most perfect reflection, under certain conditions, of that which stands to the process in the relation of cause to effect. To strip personality from the ultimate principle is to subordinate it to man in respect of the highest values of which we have any knowledge; especially is its moral character impaired. If we stop short at Matthew Arnold's "stream of tendencies making for righteousness," we are not likely to avoid a utilitarian ethic; that is we shall go back if we do not go forward. The Arnoldian formula represents an untenable compromise; it is not very intelligible, it is not easy to believe in, it is not natural to find in connection with it an absolute moral law. In opposition to this depersonalized and unmoral view, the Christian maintains that everything which is true in respect to those characteristics which make up human personality is also true of the ultimate principle which he calls God. There is no loss of values; there is no ethical impoverishment.

But the Christian has something more to say on the charge of anthropomorphism brought against him. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the plainest possible proof that he does not think of

God as a magnified man. The fear lest Christianity should not sufficiently bear in mind the transcendental character of the objects of faith becomes needless when once the fact is grasped that the doctrine of the Trinity is an unsurmountable obstacle to any attempt to co-ordinate too closely the human and the divine. Divine personality has the full meaning and value of human personality, but the conditions of existence are not the same in the two cases. There is a true similarity of content, but not in form or degree, and it is with respect to form and degree that it is important to bear in mind the difference between the earthly and the transcendental.

4. The Doctrine of Incarnation Illuminates Divine Personality

Let us proceed to a further point. Christianity is committed to the belief in divine personality, and to the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet, as a religion, Christianity did not arise in order, in the first place, to witness to or to proclaim that these beliefs are true, nor are these beliefs the secret of its life and growth. It arose as a positive answer to a question concerned primarily not with God but with a man, to the question, "Whom say ye that I am?" For Christ was to His disciples a man, before He was or could be anything else. Doubtless the disciples realized that to think of Him simply as a man and in no other way whatsoever was inadequate. It must long have been a puzzling problem, "What manner of man is this?" But the start is made from the human person. The foundations

for an answer that should be adequate were laid in the confession, "Thou art the Christ." Upon that foundation was built up the doctrine of the Incarnation, which is seen, in its full perspective, in the New Testament. Christianity as a formulated creed turns upon the truth of this doctrine. Speculatively, it would be possible to make a sharp separation of the doctrine of the Incarnation from the doctrine of the Trinity, and, historically, there is the case of the Antiochene School of the fourth and fifth centuries to show that entire fidelity to the Trinitarian conception has been compatible with a theory as to the Person of Christ which raised, and still raises, legitimate doubts as to whether the word "incarnation" could rightly be used to express it. Still, there can be little doubt that in point of fact the two doctrines will not bear dissociation. If faith in the Incarnation grows dim, faith in the Holy Trinity will grow dim also. And that means the overthrow of the Christian view of God, an overthrow which would not leave unaffected that faith in divine personality of which Christianity is the consistent and foremost exponent.

But if this be so, it is natural to ask whether there is not something in the doctrine of the Incarnation which affords a special illumination to the belief in a personal God. Admittedly, the doctrine did not take shape as a result of speculation with a view to the support or enrichment of a particular theistic world-view. There was, for instance, no deliberate intention to

enlarge and deepen the Old Testament conception. But it does not at all follow that we, who see no hope in existence if we are without God in the world, and if the world-order does not come from God, have not been given, in the Incarnation, a doctrine which at once makes our own grasp upon divine personality firmer, and enables us to make the thought of that personality more reasonable and attractive.

The moral difficulty which confronts the belief that the ultimate principle of the cosmos is Personal Mind, Will and Love has already been mentioned. The cosmos is anything but a satisfactory cosmos, in the moral sense. The Christian and the theistic explanation of this fact rests upon the belief in the value of human freedom, and the superiority of a world in which moral choices are possible over one in which there should be no such choices. The superiority of such a world cannot indeed be demonstrated, but the preference for it is perfectly reasonable. We may not, in taking our stand on this side, possess a final philosophical answer to the question, but we are preserved in our faith in the Personal, Loving, God. And our preference for a world of moral choices carries with it a rational notion of what we can mean by the omnipotence of God. Further speculations as to the finiteness of God, as to the inherent difficulties which He has to meet, and cannot meet with immediate absolute success, are quite unnecessary, however popular for the moment they may

appear to be. Nevertheless, they serve one useful purpose; they reveal a justifiable uneasiness with any doctrine of God which, while affirming that a world in which evil is possible in virtue of the reality of moral choices, is more to be desired, and is worthier of God, than a world in which there should be no room for these choices, yet tells us nothing of God's own treatment of evil.

Has God left man to wrestle with evil in an unshared struggle? Does God help man with a help which costs Him nothing? Is the terrible strain of the warfare something which has no place in the Divine experience? These are living questions. And the danger is that theistic doctrine, challenged by them, should find itself, when it tries to meet these inquiries with a sympathetic response, on a slippery slope which falls away sharply into pantheism. There is also the danger of asserting divine experience at the expense of the divine personality, at the expense too of any intelligible differentiation between good and evil.

Now it is quite obvious that the doctrine of the Incarnation stands in the closest connection with questions of this kind. But, as an answer, it is notably different from the attempts now being made to find a way out of the dilemma. These attempts are essentially speculative solutions wrung out from an inner demand. They would interpret history, but they have no historical grounding. The Incarnation is not only interpretation of history, but

revelation within history. And it is the revelation not of divine energy or force, nor even of divine spirit, but of divine personality. Christ is not human personality filled to the brim with divine power; that view has been taken, but the result is still to keep the personal God away from historical experience; Christ is God manifesting Himself personally in history, and sharing in those experiences of trial and suffering which make history the problem that it is. It is true that the years of the Incarnate life are but a tiny fragment of human history. But their brevity is a matter of no more importance than the fact that they were passed within the limits of Palestine. Such limitations are involved in the manifestation of divine personality in true human form. What matters is the character of the life, its moral depth and poignancy, not how long it lasted or where it was spent.

The doctrine of the Incarnation gives a luminous meaning to the thought of divine personality, since that personality is now apprehended under a form in which we can understand it. Its entry into historical conditions, its submission to human experiences, make it accessible to us. There can be no question, once this doctrine is grasped, of a lapse of faith into a deism which would stretch a great gulf between God and the world; there can be no question of a lapse into pantheism, since the doctrine of the Incarnation means that, in history, the personal God comes to us in Christ and not in another. In others we may recognize

divine inspiration, but there is more than that in Christ. In Him alone we have, as Dr. Forsyth has put it, not merely God's Prophet, nor even God's plenipotentiary, but God's real presence.¹ In Him we have the suffering, saving and victorious God whom many to-day seek for, but know not always where to find.

We have no right to assume that an historical revelation of the nature of the ultimate causative principle is either impossible or improbable, and then to judge of history from the standpoint of this antecedent scepticism. Nor is the plain man naturally inclined to do so; his suspicions are directed towards the abstract rather than towards the concrete. He will be more uneasy with the idea of divine personality considered, so to speak, in the abstract, than with the positive affirmation that Christ is God incarnate. It is going too far if we say, as some modern theologians are inclined to do, that what we are really convinced of with regard to God is that He is like Christ, so that the expression "the divinity of Christ" is illuminative as to God and not as to Christ, since we can only explain the unknown through the known, and not vice versa. This attitude is too reminiscent of the old Ritschlian distrust of speculative thought about God. But the plain man who believes in the Incarnation will probably attain thereby to an understanding of the idea of divine personality which would be quite beyond him were he simply to consider it as an eternal truth or reason, historically unrevealed.

1. The Person and Place of Jesus Christ. p. 83.

It is an astounding thing that those theologians who can write piously and beautifully about God, looking on Him as the personal, loving Father, and yet reject the doctrine of the Incarnation in almost off-hand fashion do not realize how much of importance they are sacrificing.¹ They think that the one doctrine stands secure in itself; that the other is a piece of mythologizing. But given the doctrine of the personal God and a reasonable motive for the Incarnation an a priori unbelief in the latter ceases to possess scientific respectability; while if the historical facts as to Christ produce the conviction that in the life and death of Christ God is uniquely revealed, there is nothing except the impossibility of explaining the method--and such impossibilities are inevitable wherever we conceive that we apprehend the interaction of the human and the divine--to check the advance to the full confession that in Christ the personal God entered into history.

Moreover, a very important fact emerges from that full confession. The theistic belief has a definite moral superiority over pantheistic and theosophical creeds by the presence in it of the sense of responsibility of the personal God. The old Puritan realization of life and work as taking place under the great Taskmaster's eye was a precious thing, and it is only possible when God is thought of as fully personal. But though it is only possible in connection with this belief, it is not therefore easy; the

1. Wernle, *The Beginnings of Christianity*. Vol. I, p. 251.

judgments of God may seem to be far away, out of sight, the character of those judgments to be too uncertain, too much obscured by the interpretations of this or that individual, for them to exercise their true weight and control. The belief in the Incarnation supplies the means of true ethical measurements and valuations. The whole ethic of Christ's life, His words and works and Cross, represents and is God's own righteousness. Once again there is need for warning against the humanitarian tendency. It is, of course, of the greatest value to see in Christ's life the ideal for man; but it should be remembered that that is not simply because He is perfect Man, but because, since He is God as well as Man, He reveals the truth about God's moral Being, reveals it by word, but still more by action and suffering, by life and by death. And the revelation, personally given, by God of God's moral being is the final revelation of all; it brings us into the Holy of Holies.

In the light of these considerations we look at Jesus—not at his person, technically regarded, but at himself. We are prepared to see divine and human expressed in one person and life, and it is in view of what the personality has done that we expect to judge of what nature it is. As a matter of fact, we find in Jesus a manifestation of God so great and clear that from him men have learned what God invisible must be like; and the conception of God that he has imparted has commended itself to the best faith and love and judgment of mankind. This is the best

seen, and justify all our adoration, of God in Christ.

If we are to make more of belief in a personal God, if that belief is to have its richest meaning and greatest driving-power, if we are to be saved from interpretations which do fairly lie open to the accusation of anthropomorphism, we shall do well to throw upon that belief the illumination which faith in the Incarnation creates. Browning's prayer for the professor must be our prayer for thousands who otherwise will drift anchorless, at the mercy of every wind of changing opinion:

When thicker and thicker the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth, or personification,
May Christ do for him what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of Salvation.

evidence that God was in him and was working in him for the good of men---evidence better than either miracles or metaphysics could give. We cannot define what in him is divine and what is human, which indeed no one has ever been able to do, but in the manifestation of the personality we read the personality; in the human expression we read the man, and in the manifestation of God we see God. God is there, and we know it because He has spoken and acted there; He has looked out through the eyes of Jesus, beaming his own character upon the world. He has expressed his own purity, his tenderness toward his creatures, and his redemptive grace. He has shown us his sorrow over our sins, his love for our souls, and his patient will to save. God was in Christ visible, audible and knowable, and we have seen and heard and known Him there.

What we know of God reminds us that there was here no need of limitation or differentiation of His being, save as he always limits Himself in dealing with his worlds. It is God himself who can make humanity His temple. God who has made man in his own likeness can fill him with His own fulness. It is God who can incarnate Himself. He is capable of all relations with his universe for which its needs may call, and His relation to human nature in the person of Jesus Christ is no exception. God Himself, whose personality, in our sense of the word, is a single personality is sufficient to account for all that we have

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